

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SS-15 L-02 NSC-05 CU-04 PA-02 PRS-01

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6043

UNCLAS NEW DELHI 0064

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SCUL IN US

SUBJECT: NORTON SIMON NATARAJA

FOLLOWING SENT ACTION NEW DELHI FROM MADRAS DEC 31 IS REPEATED

QUOTE

MADRAS 1643

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SCUL, IN, US

SUBJECT: NORTON SIMON NATARAJA

1. FOLLOWING IS TEXT ARTICLE BY EASWAR SAGAR,
ENTITLED "U.S. ART COLLECTOR WILLING FOR
TALKS ON RETURN OF IDOL", WHICH APPEARED IN MADRAS
HINDU MORNING DECEMBER 31 (DATELINED WASHINGTON,
DECEMBER 30);

"MR NORTON SIMON, THE AMERICAN ART COLLECTOR,
WHO NOW HAS POSSESSION OF THE FAMOUS 10TH CENTURY BRONZE NATARAJA
IDOL WHICH WAS STOLEN FROM A TEMPLE IN SIVAPURAM, IS REPORTED TO BE
ONCE AGAIN WILLING TO TALK WITH INDIAN AUTHORITIES ABOUT RETURNING
THE BRONZE TO INDIA, BUT HE HAS QUALIFIED THIS OFFER BY STATING
THAT HE WILL NOT SUBMIT TO "INTIMIDATION".

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IN AN INTERVIEW WITH A NEW YORK TIMES REPORTER, MR. SIMON HAS SAID: "I AM SYMPATHETIC TO THEIR (INDIA'S) NEEDS, AND IF THEY CAN PROVE IT IS THEIR PROPERTY THEY WILL GET IT BACK. EVEN IF THEY DON'T PROVE OWNERSHIP, WHICH I DON'T THINK THEY WILL I AM STILL WILLING TO TALK TO THEM. BUT YOU CAN'T JUST WAVE WANDS AND SAY YOU HAVE TITLE (TO THE STATUE)."

MR. SIMON'S REFERENCE TO INTIMIDATION OBVIOUSLY PERTAINS TO DOLS2.5 MILLION SUIT FILED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA AGAINST THE NORTON SIMON FOUNDATION AND THE ART DEALER IN NEW YORK WHO SOLD THE IDOL TO MR. SIMON.

MR. SIMON WHO HAD PREVIOUSLY PROMISED, IN AGREEMENT ARRIVED AT WITH A SENIOR INDIAN EMBASSY OFFICIAL HERE, TO RETURN THE IDOL IF CERTAIN CONDITIONS WERE MET, APPARENTLY WENT BACK ON THE DEAL LATER, CLAIMING THAT INDIA HAD NOT FULFILLED THOSE CONDITIONS. THE INDIAN EMBASSY SAYS THAT IT WAS MR. SIMON WHO FAILED TO PUT THE AGREEMENT IN WRITING AND IMPLEMENT IT.

MR. SIMON HAS NOW ALSO TAKEN UP CUDGELS AGAINST AMBASSADOR MOYNIHAN WHO HAS TRIED TO HELP BOTH MR. SIMON AND THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA TO COME TO AN AMICABLE SOLUTION. HE HAS ACCUSED MR. MOYNIHAN OF TRYING TO "TRADE ME OFF FOR POLITICAL INFLUENCE IN TAMIL NADU". THINGS WERE GOING WELL UNTIL MR. MOYNIHAN INTERVENED. THE INDIANS HAVE PROBLEMS IN TAMIL NADU AND TAMIL NADU WANTS THE NATARAJA BACK. I KNOW THEY HAVE PROBLEMS, BUT I SAY TO MR. MOYNIHAN, DON'T PUSH ME AROUND."

MR. MOYNIHAN HAS RESPONDED TO THIS CHARGE BY SAYING THAT HE HAD ONLY TRIED TO BRING THE TWO PARTIES TOGETHER SO THEY COULD FIND A FRIENDLY SOLUTION. "THE NATARAJA IS A LIVING STATUE OF A LIVING RELIGION. I WOULD BE HAPPY TO HAVE IT BACK IN INDIA. I WOULD FEEL THE SAME WAY IF THE STATUE OF THE VIRGIN WAS MISSING FROM ST. PATRICKS. I AM SORRY TO SEE MR. SIMON SO UNHAPPY BECAUSE HE IS A GOOD MAN. BUT YOU CANNOT POSSIBLY DESCRIBE OUR ACTIVITIES AS TRYING TO TRADE HIM OFF. WE WERE TRYING TO DO WHAT TWO GOVERNMENTS WOULD BE EXPECTED TO DO IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES. THE GOVERNMENT OF TAMIL NADU WAS VERY INSISTENT IN ITS STATEMENTS ABOUT THE NATARAJA AND THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA HAS HAD TO RESPOND."

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REFERRING TO THE TENTATIVE AGREEMENT THAT WAS ARRIVED AT MR. MOYNIHAN HAS SAID THAT SETTLEMENT SEEMED TO BE "THE MOST AMICABLE OF ARRANGEMENTS. WHY IT ALL CAME APART I DON'T KNOW. THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA HAS BEHAVED WITH GREAT FORBEARANCE AND OPEN-MINDEDNESS, AND THAT IS NOT SOMETHING I WOULD SAY EVERYDAY. IN THE END THEY DID, WHAT A GOVERNMENT HAS TO DO" -MEANING THE PRESENT LAW SUIT. SIGNED EAVES

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